



NEWS RELEASE

Office of the United States Attorney
Eastern District of Texas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LUFKIN MAN ARRESTED FOR HURRICANE RELIEF FRAUD

(Lufkin, TX) A 48-year-old Lufkin man has been arrested for mail fraud after posing as a Hurricane Rita victim and attempting to defraud the federal government. **JOSEPH EARL JOHNSON** appeared today for a detention hearing before United States Magistrate Judge Keith F. Giblin.

According to information presented in court, Johnson allegedly devised a scheme to defraud the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) by submitting a false claim that he was a resident of the Beaumont area and entitled to receive disaster relief benefits because his residence had been destroyed and he was in need of emergency food shelter and clothing, none of which was true. On October 3, 2005, Johnson was arrested by U.S. Postal Inspectors when he attempted to take possession of a treasury check from FEMA at a mail facility in Beaumont.

If convicted, Johnson faces up to 20 years in federal prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.

It is important to remember that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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The case is part of an initiative by the Department of Justice Hurricane Fraud Task Force, set up by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales last month to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft and insurance and benefits fraud.

The case is being investigated by the United States Postal Inspection Service. Assistant U.S. Attorney Reynaldo P. Morin is prosecuting the case.

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